



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending October 4, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

EASTERN WASHINGTON TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS RECEIVE FUNDING

This week the House Appropriations Committee, of which I am a member, agreed to funding levels in the annual transportation spending bill. Funding for Eastern Washington includes:

\$1 million for U.S. Highway 12 / SR 124 improvements

This funding will be combined with state funds to complete Phase 2 of the seven-phase project to widen Hwy. 12 from two lanes to four. Phase 2 targets the rehabilitation of four bridges that cross a railroad spur, which experience heavy traffic from a nearby mill. This is a dangerous highway that has seen nearly 1,000 accidents in the last 10 years.

Highway 12 funding is a high priority for me. Upgrading the road will increase the safety of travelers, but it is also key to our economic vitality. Freight trucks account for a third of the traffic volume on this stretch of road. I believe Walla Walla, which boasts the fastest growing wine industry in the country, will see more companies move to town once there is four-lane highway in place.

\$1.15 million for Pullman Transit

Funding this project will allow the City of Pullman/Pullman Transit to replace five of its aging buses that lacked wheelchair lifts. New buses will help keep up with growing ridership; in the last 10 years, ridership has increased 100 percent.

\$2.5 million for Monroe Street Bridge, Spokane

An important link between north and south Spokane, the bridge was the largest concrete arch bridge in the United States and the third largest in the world when it was built in 1910. This landmark is at the end of its service life, and will soon begin rehabilitation to extend its service life for another 75 years, while preserving its historic character and appearance.

The Monroe Street Bridge is in desperate need of repair. This funding will keep a landmark alive and a vital transportation route in service.

\$2.1 million for new airport approach system at Omak Airport

This funding will allow Omak Airport to procure, install and maintain a Transponder Landing System (TLS). TLS is a precision approach landing system designed for use at airports where complex terrain or real estate constraints make the installation and use of a traditional Instrument Landing System (ILS) cost-prohibitive or not feasible. The TLS promotes aviation safety and economic growth by enabling aircraft to land in Instrument Meteorological Conditions at airports where such landings are not otherwise possible.

Next, the transportation spending bill will be voted on by the House of Representatives. After the Senate passes its transportation bill, a conference committee will work out differences between the two bills, before sending a final bill to the President for his signature.

SPOKANE COUNTY ELIGIBLE FOR MORE FUNDS TO FIGHT METH

Spokane County has been designated as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), which makes the county eligible for a share of \$4 million allocated to the Northwest region. This designation follows my work to convince the Office of National Drug Control Policy to include Spokane as part of Northwest HIDTA.

HIDTA's goals include reducing drug trafficking, money laundering and drug-related violent crimes, and reducing demand by supporting treatment and effective demand reduction programs.

Methamphetamine production and use is devastating to our communities. More troubling is that this is a growing problem in Eastern Washington. The number of meth labs in Spokane County nearly doubled between 2000 and 2001. This designation will help our law enforcement officials and treatment programs meet this problem.

Spokane joins Yakima County to become only the second Eastern Washington county part of Northwest HIDTA. Other HIDTA counties run along the I-5 corridor, including Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, King, Pierce, and Thurston Counties. Earlier this year, I fought to increase Eastern Washington's share of money to fight meth by 600 percent.

LEGISLATION

This week I introduced the **Pancreatic Islet Cell Transplantation Act of 2002**. Islet cell transplantation is the most exciting advance in diabetes research since the discovery of insulin in 1921. This procedure, which involves the transplantation of islet

cells from a pancreas, moves us closer to a cure for the millions of Americans that suffer from diabetes. Researchers demonstrated that islet transplantation can reverse diabetes in human clinical trials. Additional research is needed so that the trials are safe and appropriate for all patients with diabetes. My legislation establishes a federal inter-agency committee to coordinate and focus attention on this research at the federal level, as well as to advise the Secretary of Health and Human Services on regulations and policies to move the research forward. In addition, the bill provides incentives to move research forward.

I also introduced legislation with Rep. Diana DeGette, my co-chair on the Congressional Diabetes Caucus. The **Diabetes Prevention Access and Care Act** authorizes additional National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention research that identifies clinical, socio-economical, geographical, cultural, and organizational factors within minority populations that contribute to the onset of type 2 (previously called adult-onset) diabetes and poor health management of type 1, or juvenile diabetes.

In an effort to prevent diabetes, the bill authorizes programs that provide for better access to education on the causes and effects of diabetes for minority populations. In addition, the bill requires the identification and implementation of appropriate and comprehensive modes of treatment and care for minority populations.

Diabetes is a health crisis in minority communities. Among adults over the age of 19, African Americans are twice as likely as Caucasians to have diabetes, and American Indians and Alaska Natives are two and a half times more likely to have diabetes.

I signed a letter to Labor Secretary Elaine Chao urging her to wait on implementing a **new formula for unemployment insurance** administrative funding. Implementing the new formula before the scheduled start date would result in a \$4.8 million loss to Washington state.

ON THE FLOOR

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week:

H.J.Res. 112, Making continuing appropriations for Fiscal Year 2003. The bill passed by a vote of 404-7. I voted yes.

The 2003 fiscal year began on Oct. 1, 2002. This bill was needed to keep the federal government operating for the near term while Congress finishes its work on FY2003 spending bills.

H.R. 2357, Houses of Worship Political Speech Protection Act. The bill failed by a vote of 178-239. I voted in favor of the bill.

This legislation amends the Internal Revenue Code to permit a church to participate or intervene in a political campaign and maintain its tax-exempt status as long as such participation is not a substantial part of its activities. The measure returns freedom of speech to America's religious leaders by giving them the ability to speak out on the moral and political issues of the day without fear of losing their tax-exempt status. Federal laws will still require that a political action committee be formed to make cash donations to Federal candidates; most states have similar laws for state candidates.

Prior to 1954, pastors and religious leaders spoke freely about candidates and political issues when they felt the need. The slavery abolitionist organizations and the civil rights movement are great examples of church inspired political successes. In 1954, then Senator Lyndon Johnson added language to pending tax legislation to prevent two non-profit groups that opposed him in 1948 from speaking out against him in his 1954 re-election. Since then, that tax language has been used to silence political speech in America's houses of worship.

H.R. 5091, Canceling Loans to Allow School Systems to Attract Classroom Teachers Act (CLASS ACT). The bill passed on a voice vote. I voted yes.

This bill authorizes an increase in the total loan forgiveness for elementary and secondary teachers in economically disadvantaged schools. In order to attract more quality teachers to the classroom, the maximum loan forgiveness is increased from \$5,000 to \$17,500. H.R. 5091 also provides an incentive for teachers to work in disadvantaged areas with a priority for teachers of special education, mathematics and science.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

Spokane Office

920 W. Riverside, Suite 594
Spokane, WA 99201
509-353-2374
Fax: 509-353-2412

Spokane Valley Office

9209 E. Mission Avenue, Suite C
Spokane, WA 99206
509-924-7775
Fax: 509-924-7671

Colville Office

Walla Walla Office

29 S. Palouse Street
Walla Walla, WA 99362
509-529-9358
Fax: 509-529-9379

Washington, D.C. Office

223 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-224-2006
Fax: 202-225-3392

Website

555 S. Main Street
Colville, WA 99114
509-684-3481
Fax: 509-684-3482

www.house.gov/nethercutt

Electronic Mail

www.house.gov/nethercutt/contact